

Conversation with Don Green

By Don Green

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Nathaniel Pringle. Well, as I mentioned as I welcomed us here this evening, this is a special evening and there is no one in this building happier than me to have Don Green in the building tonight and in the building on Sunday as well. We're so thankful that the Lord sustained him and has brought him back after the sabbatical. The last four months roughly have given me just a greater appreciation for my brother and co-laborer here, and the load that he carries as he leads us as a church. There were some Sundays I left thinking Don did this for 10 years, and just amazed at God's grace and his endurance. And in 2 Timothy 2 and verses 3 through 6, Paul says to Timothy, "Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops." And in the 10 years that I've gotten to know Don, over the 10 years and then the two years of working with him, having the privilege of working here at Truth, I would say that in my understanding Don epitomizes what Paul is asking Timothy to do. In his laborers he is a soldier. He understands the rules and abides by the rule of Scripture, and is a hard-working farmer in the word of God. And so it is a great privilege for me personally to serve as the Associate Pastor here under Don's leadership, and I look up to Don like an elder brother, which as the oldest of five kids I never had one, but he is definitely an elder brother in the Lord, and so with great joy and with great relief, Don, would you join me, please, here in the platform tonight.

Don Green. You know your job was safe before you said anything, right?

Nathaniel. I was hoping so.

Don. But yeah, if you could do my funeral, that would be excellent.

Nathaniel. Well, let's hope that that's not for until after I'm dead and you've done mine. I don't know how that will work, but...

Don. Yeah, I don't think Katie likes what you just said. But no, before we get started with this, it's been a great great encouragement to me to hear the unanimous and multiple multiple voices affirming Nathaniel's ministry over the past, over the past four months. It's just been remarkable how uniform what everybody said with their appreciation for your ministry and just how excellent it was. And so thank you for how you served

everyone and served our church over these past four months. I know that it's a labor to do it alone, so that's very well deserved. {applause}

Someone texted me that wasn't with us on Sunday, I wasn't going to tell this story but I'm going to. I decided to anyway. It's family time, right? We're family right?

Nathaniel. That's right.

Don. And they were asking if I was there, if I was back because they weren't able to watch the live stream and I said yeah, I was. I said I was back but I said it was sad. It's sad. I said in the middle of my sermon, I'm preaching my heart out, a chant comes up, "We want Nathaniel! We want Nathaniel!"

Nathaniel. Well, you didn't hear how many times it was we went, "Don!" over the last four months.

Don. Yeah, enough of my silliness.

Nathaniel. We're really glad to have you back. It was great to hear you preach again on Sunday and I'll just counter that with a little story of mine from the four months. After you did the first leadership meeting back in September, which sounds like a lifetime ago now, I had my family listen to it while we were driving somewhere, and I don't know, it was a month or so into the time and one of my daughters, I don't even remember which one it was said, "I miss Pastor Don." So you've been missed and it's wonderful to have you back and we're excited for what is ahead.

Don. Thank you. Yeah, you've got a, you've got a sweet family, your girls are adorable so your whole family is a blessing to us.

Nathaniel. Well, Amen. Well, let's get into some questions here that perhaps reflect what people are thinking and wondering about the last four months and, you know, the great big elephant in the room. How was your sabbatical?

Don. Well, it was, it was excellent. It went a different direction than what we had planned. It was actually a life lesson in Proverbs 16:9, you know, "The mind of man plans his way but the Lord directs his steps." And you know, I had a plan for how I was going to write and we were going to get things done around the house and do a lot of reading and all of that, and a lot of the it didn't work out, it didn't work out that way. As it turned out, she's in the room tonight, our daughter Gretchen, was hospitalized early on in the Sabbatical. She was in Virginia and then in Minnesota for a couple of months and she's still in a good bit of pain and having difficulty walking but we, Nancy and I, spent a lot of time over those, over many, many weeks at her side supporting her and helping her, and we were very glad to do that. It was a lesson in the wisdom of the Lord and what the Lord's plans were in advance. If I had been engaged in ministry, we wouldn't have had the freedom to do exactly what we did, and so I still got a lot of work done but it was the change in location and the many travels back and forth put that in a different direction

than what we had planned. But by the Lord's grace, when I started to see what was happening, I put aside any plans to write and just focused on preparing the pulpit and preparing a lot of different sermon series so that I've got, you know, I've probably sketched out outlines to, you know, over 100 messages. So I've got a lot of work banked up in the future going forward and now all of that stuff is just deeply compressed in my mind and in my heart, and it's like shaking up a Coke can and just waiting for it to pop open and it all spills out at once. So I'll try to keep it under control.

Nathaniel. So with even with the changes of plans and, you know, I think I can speak for the rest of the Truth Community Church body in saying we're committed to be praying for Gretchen as she continues to go through this time and for the family, and we deeply love you and your family and stand by for anything that we can do as the church body.

Don. Yeah, I appreciate that. Thank you. Yeah, so she's assigned here right now to be with us while she's pursuing treatment in the civilian medical system here after being in the military system for that time. So doctors are looking for answers and we're confident that eventually they will but right now we're still waiting.

Nathaniel. Amen. But with the change of plans, you know, you've been preparing for the Sabbatical for a number of months leading up to the Sabbatical, you had a number of goals, I would assume, and you touched on that very briefly, but what were some of the things that perhaps in a little bit more detail that you were able to accomplish? You mentioned some of the sermons. What did you say, 100?

Don. Yeah, at least. At least.

Nathaniel. That's like more than one a day.

Don. Well, they're sketching out outlines and you work on a number of things at the same time when you're working on a big passage, and then you realize that what the work you just did breaks down to three or four messages instead of one, and so that's how it kind of multiplies in the way I do things. But it's not one a day if you do the math. And I've still got, all of that still has to be developed. These are outlines not fully developed messages

Nathaniel. Okay. So with that feeling of being a bottle about ready to explode, any messages stand out that you can't wait to preach or....?

Don. Yeah, I'm excited about all of it, but to be able to sketch out an exposition of Colossians is really great, our union with Christ and our sufficiency in Christ. That's going to be very helpful and impactful and I can't wait for that. I sketched out probably 50 messages in Revelation and I know a lot of people are talking about that and waiting for that, but that's going to, that'll be several months in the future before I get to that. My, you know, I'm really, you know, and I don't want to take away what I'm going to say this Sunday, but this Sunday I'm going to outline what will happen over the next five or six months. You know, I'm too close to be able to rightly assess this, but I think without a doubt these next six months will be the most important months of my pulpit ministry ever

in terms of what it's going to lay out and the systematic way that it's going to do it. So I can only encourage you to be there. Ultimately, I can't lasso somebody and bring them, force them to come in, but this is critical and it's like, you know, this will mark a second season in the life of Truth Community Church that I hope will reverberate for a long time to come. These next six months are going to be like planting acorns that decades from now hopefully there will be people sitting under the shade of the oak tree that springs up from it. So that's my goal and, you know, we'll trust the Lord to do with it as he pleases.

Nathaniel. And I want to come back to that a little bit later and have you expand on that a little bit more, but one other question back to the time that you had along with the sermon preparation, sketching the sermon outlines and that kind of thing, what kind of reading were you able to accomplish during that time?

Don. Yeah, I read a lot of biographies, a lot of Christian biographies of great Christian leaders from the past, a lot of church history in addition to some doctrinal works and different things. One book by Martyn Lloyd-Jones in particular, but two books if you want to take down two books that I would recommend just that come immediately to mind, one of the short biographies was by Joel Beeke who is a modern writer and a good Reformed thinker. He and another author did a biography on a man named William Perkins. It's a "Bitesize" biography, that's the name of the series, and I don't even know if it's available on Amazon or not; I may have bought it used. But he was he was a 16th century thinker, predated a lot of the Puritans, but as I was reading about him and about his theology, he built a lot of his theology out of the Sermon on the Mount and some of the things that he said in a practical way, I mean, I just thought this man is, I mean this is my flesh and blood that as I was reading about his ministry, and it's a little-known fact of church history that he actually had a formative impact on the development of Calvinism before Calvin was even born as I recall the dates. I may be off here a bit. He didn't predate Calvin, but he predated the Synod of Dort where the Five Points of Calvinism were developed in 1619. That biography was really good, and then secondly...

Nathaniel. What was the name of that one again?

Don. It was is just William Perkins by Joel Beeke, and then the second was a book that I just finished this past week that's a broad overview of church history called "Sketches from Church History," by, it's published by Banner of Truth. S. M. Houghton is the author of that. "Sketches from Church History." For those of you that don't do much reading, it is a chapter book but it's got a lot of pictures. It's got a lot of great pictures and illustrations from the past and just it's sweeps through church history in a really effective, a really winsome way. And with the idea of sketches, it gives a lot of personal vignettes about individuals and not just facts and dates. And that book just really, really ministered to my heart as a kind of a whole sweep through church history and the really crucial thing about this book that you don't find in a lot of church history books, is that it understands that the Catholic Church is not part of church history, true church history, and it distinguishes the truth from Catholicism in a way that isn't always made plain in standard books on church history. So it's really valuable in that sense and you just read through, you read through the lives of these leaders and the lives of ordinary Christians like you

and me and the way they suffered so much for the sake of the gospel and, you know, reading about the French Huguenots who were slaughtered by the thousands on Saint Bartholomew's Day in 1572, and the Catholic Church just butchered these people by the thousands and all for the sake of the truth that we hold dear. And you can't read that without being challenged to, you know, to be more earnest in your Christianity, to be more earnest about the Lord, and it shapes your view of what the purpose of the church is. You know, when you contemplate these things and in a different realm, different country, you know, you see the way men like John Knox suffered for the gospel and the courage and the scholarship and the stamina that they did preaching until, you know, people were carrying him into the pulpit at the end of his life so that he could speak. That really speaks to me and you read these things in that book, "Sketches from Church History," and you just get a little flavor of it and it just gives you a different perspective on the nature of the church today. You know, people are fascinated with themselves and the church today and it, you know, and people in ministry, you know, they pride themselves and they market themselves as relational guys. Well, these men in church history, they weren't relational first, they were committed to the truth first and foremost, and they battled and they suffered for it. And man, that motivates, that motivates me, and, you know, just reaffirms my commitment to, you know, to preach the word in season and out of season. So those are a couple. I got a long list of things that I read, but those are two that stand out to me.

Nathaniel. And you know, I think you hit on this so well and eloquently in capturing the value of reading church history and...

Don. Oh totally.

Nathaniel. ...Christian biography. Sometimes it's easy to think I need to read my Bible, which I do, and you know, maybe we could even talk about the importance of reading our Bible personally, we need to do that but seeing the lives of other people who've read their Bibles in centuries past and how it affected them and lived out, and the way they lived out their lives, it gives us a whole new perspective of approaching the truth and approaching Scripture, approaching the Christian life.

Don. Yeah, you know, I mean, I've read so many stories, you know, in the past four months of people that were led to the stake because they wouldn't renounce, they wouldn't renounce Christ and, you know, was it Polycarp, I think, that said, you know, they threatened to kill him and he said, "Eighty and six years I've lived for Christ has been faithful to me. Why would I betray him now?" You know, and as an old man they, you know, they executed him in a shameful way and, you know, and he was faithful to the end. Well, you know, that gives us some perspective on our problems and the challenges that we face. You know, and I told you, I was like a Coke bottle that's getting shook up and now it's all starting to come out.

Nathaniel. That's good. I'm just sitting here relaxing and listening.

Don. Yeah, you restrain me and help me.

Nathaniel. Okay.

Don. And help me here, you know, and we're all guilty of this and I'm, you know, I'm chief among sinners in what I'm about to describe. It's so easy to be so wrapped up in the problems of our day and the problems of our lives and the individualistic things that we face and in America, you know, as we see more liberal, more ungodly leadership take up and worry about the rights that we're losing, but what Scripture says to the Hebrews is true of us, none of us have resisted to the point of shedding blood. You see our situation in comparison to church history, and we've actually got it pretty easy. And the church does not flourish under political prosperity, the church flourishes under persecution and that's when the church is at its best and when it shines forth the most, and I'm not looking to be persecuted, and I'm not, you know, I've barely been insulted for the sake of Christ, but it just helps us have the modern situation in perspective. You know, we don't have Catholic bishops tracking us down in order to kill us like so many did in the past, and that gives us a sense of, okay, if the Lord sustained them and brought them to glory, then he can do the same thing for me in less difficult circumstances, and it just kind of, it humbles us to put our situation in a proper perspective and not think that we're the first ones to have difficulties because of our convictions.

Nathaniel. Yeah, it changes our approach to Scripture even to thinking I'm not reading this for me to know how to have a good day today.

Don. Right.

Nathaniel. I'm reading the word of God because it's preparing me to stand fast for the sake of Christ and ultimately to die well, if that should be the case, I'm reading this book in order to die well, not to live well.

Don. Or to live well, or to live easy. To live easy. So that book would do, you know, if we had a few dozen people in our church just reading through the "Sketches of Church History" over the next few weeks, it would change a lot of conversations and people would say, "Did you read this? Can you believe that this happened to So-and-so?" And you know, there are a lot of names that you don't know and there's almost, it's almost, you know, trying to drink from a fire hydrant because there's so many names and stories that are coming out, but, you know, there's enough there that you can get a good taste of it, and I appreciate that book.

Nathaniel. What you said there just captured the idea too of the unity of the body, where we talk about that a lot. And you know, ultimately, it's unity that comes from our fellowship in Christ that comes from the Spirit of God, but we can cultivate that as we're pursuing the same things for maturing in Christ, reading the same things, church history, informing our conversations when we're together and, you know, even in the bulletin we've been putting chapters and passages of Scripture to read together as a church and looking to read through the New Testament in the first five months of the year. Those things aren't accidental. We're not just throwing those things out there. There's an

intentionality for the cultivation of the unity of the body in those practical ways when we're not gathered so that when we are gathered we're focused on the same things. I don't know, am I flushing that out and it's accurate?

Don. Yeah, for sure for sure. And when, you know, and having gone through the book of Revelation and you just see, you know, the martyrs are crying out, "God, how long until you avenge our blood?" Well, you know, you read that about what's still in the future and you see that there's just a spirit of suffering and a spirit of opposition that has been present from the very beginning of the church since Pentecost and the death and resurrection of Christ, the spirit of opposition and the spirit of Antichrist has been active for 2,000 years in the body of Christ and it's going to continue until Christ returns and puts an end to it. And so it just helps us, it helps inform our expectations about what Christianity is supposed to be like. It is an utter rebuke of the spirit of moralistic therapeutic deism, which I always come back to that and the Seeker Sensitive, friendly, popular approach to Christianity, that is not real Christianity. And as I said, I think on Sunday I said a lot of things. I don't remember what all I said on Sunday. I'll have to go back and read the transcript. But Jesus Christ did not give his life and the men that followed like Chrysostom in the 4th century and John Calvin and John Knox and Charles Spurgeon, and Martyn Lloyd-Jones and Martin Luther and William Perkins, these men did not give their life and their energies and the French Huguenots didn't pour their blood like a river in order to preserve what we see now as the modern evangelical church. This is not what they died for, this popular spirit of wanting to be popular and big conferences and all of that. Man, these people were running for their lives. They weren't gathering together in big conferences. You know, we need to be mindful of that and, you know, if we suffer and people insult us or say bad things about us, well, you know that's really superficial compared to what our forefathers went through for the sake of Christ. And I I'm just being really candid and transparent with you, I want to be faithful to the spirit of those men that went before me. I don't want to identify with the spirit of this age. I don't belong to this age.

Nathaniel. That's right. Be a soldier, right? Be a soldier for Christ Jesus.

Don. And soldiers, I'm glad you used the word "soldier" there, you know, the valor and the worth of soldiers is proven in battle, not in the parade. And you know, and so if conflict comes as a result of the truth, and you know, that's where a Christian proves their battle, that's where the Lord proves his faithfulness to us. Anybody can outwardly seem to be doing well and like an approach to Christianity when it's easy, but that's not the test. The test is when the opposition comes. Then does the man in the pulpit, does the Christian in the workplace, does the student at school when being a Christian costs you a job, when it costs you academic opportunity, when it costs you family relationships. You know, what are you then? That's when the Christian character is revealed.

Nathaniel. You know, thinking about what you're studying in Colossians, one of the characters in Colossians, Epaphras, I believe at the end he's at the beginning at the end, and at the end Paul recognizes him for his agonizing in prayer for the Colossians in the midst of difficulty. And Epaphras is kind of one of my scriptural heroes for that verse,

because Colossae obviously had some issues but that man was prevailing in prayer for the Colossians in the difficult time and just showing spiritual...

Don. Yeah, and it seems like from, it seems from what like what from what Paul says about him in that letter, that he was probably the founding force to the church at Colossae and he came back and, you know, he'd been with Paul, went to Colossae, founded the church, came back when there were problems, and Paul sends back a report as a result of that, a church that Paul hadn't been to. And so there's just so much that you know that can be done through one faithful man. And you know, a man that's identified, a woman that's identified with the cause of Christ and, you know, whose mind is feeding on these things, you're exactly right, you know, this starts to spill over into the things that you pray about and the spirit and the groaning even that sometimes you have in prayer as you watch things play out in our world and in the church.

Nathaniel. Other than the reading and the things that you gleaned from church history, were there other areas, spiritual insights, that you gleaned through that time?

Don. Yeah, you didn't need to do this follow-up because now I've got to come clean, right? You know, kind of shifting from the big picture thing to the personal aspect, getting away from ministry and, you know, the immediate day-to-day demands of it, which I love and which I embrace, it's easy to be misunderstood when I say something like that, but stepping back, let's say, from things just exposed to me how dreadfully inadequate my prayer life had become. And you know, and I say this to my shame. I mean, I've taught through the Psalms from 1 to 150, if you'd done that, you'd figured you'd, you know, mastered a little something about prayer, but it gave me the opportunity, it gave me opportunity to think about things from a different perspective, Nathaniel, and I just had to realize and acknowledge just how cold and mechanical my praying had become. You know, there's a consistent time pattern to my praying generally speaking, but the agonizing that you described from Epaphras, well, you know, for me is, you know, looking back on, you know, the last couple of years or so, just seeing, you know, if I got through the particular list for that day, I was satisfied whether I had actually communed with God or not, whether I had actually agonized in prayer or not. You know, it's just so easy to be so mechanical in prayer. I know I'm not the only one in the room that has experienced that, and reading the biography of William Perkins really prompted me in this direction and just kind of convicted me and showed me a better way forward. So I'm still trying to work out, trying to outwork that, as it were, but it's been refreshing to just acknowledge my coldness before the Lord and seek his forgiveness and his grace for that and then try to, you know, try to go in a better and a different direction going forward.

Nathaniel. So you're saying that spiritual growth is something that is ongoing?

Don. Yeah, sanctification is a process, not an attainment, and there is no such thing as sinless perfection in the Christian life while we're living here on earth.

Nathaniel. It's one of the most liberating realities.

Don. Tell me about it. Also, it also is a great protection against hypocrisy. If you think that, you know, if you had told people that I've attained sinless perfection however you want to define that and however you might dumb it down, once you've said that you have to maintain that persona and it just leads to a whole lot of hypocrisy. A lot better too and a lot more biblical to be with Paul in Romans 7 and say, "Wretched man that I am, who will set me free from the body of this death?" And then let that turn you to rest in Christ, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." But it's, you know, our relief, and our peace is in Christ, not in our performance. And you know, we are united with Christ. We are sufficient in him. In him you have been made complete. And so a right understanding of our sinfulness, even as Christians, causes us to look outward to Christ and to be, you know, and to rest in him, his person, his work. We're identified with all that he has done in his death, burial, and resurrection and that is our security and our peace and our confidence with God, not my performance because, listen, my performance is miserably short of what it should be even on a human level, let alone to what it, you know, to compare it to the example of our precious Lord.

Nathaniel. Just that, you know, maybe somebody's listening and thinking, "You know what? I want, I yearn to pray. I feel that cold mechanical element in my life," and will there be any, you know, on the one hand, it's a very personal thing in your soul, I mean, it's something that God works through in your soul and through his word, but any just pastoral direction that you would even give to someone who desires to continue to learn to pray in a way that honors Christ and reflects their love for him?

Don. I think one of the things to realize maybe for those of you that have come out of Catholic backgrounds or other liturgical backgrounds, you're used to formula prayers, you're used to rote praying and all of that, is to realize that God and Christ never intended it to be that way. You know, the Psalms, the 150 Psalms are in one manner or another, they're almost all vertically directed in worship and yet there's such great diversity in them. Just recognizing that there is intended to be a diversity in the way that we pray, that prayer is, you know, in some ways it's made personal by kind of examining your life, thinking through your life on a day-to-day basis. You know, what trials am I going through that I can go dependently to the Lord and ask him for grace to help me through?

There's four T's that I'm going to give you here. I wasn't going to get into this, but you made me. Even before you go to prayer just to take a few moments to contemplate, "Okay, what's pressing on my mind now? What's weighing me down?" And to turn that into not to worry but turn that into prayer, "God, I bring this trial to you. Please help me. Be gracious to me in this, or be gracious to, you know, my loved one who's going through their trial." That's one thing, and even better to start it with a sense of the Trinity, start it with a sense of worship and remembering instead of rushing in, "God, I've got 1, 2, 3 problems here, or I've got this list of prayer items that I've got to get through." We always need to step back and remember that we're praying to the ineffable, immutable, Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We're praying through the name of Christ who loved us and gave himself up for us on the cross by his shed blood, I have access to him. You know, that changes your perspective and you contemplate and God lifts you out of

the mundane of daily life and reminds you of who it is. "Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed would be your name." As you think through the Lord's Prayer, then there's a matter of trespasses, and you know, and just being candid about your sinfulness and confessing sin to God. That's to be a regular part of Christian praying and Christian living that there is a confession of sin, and teachers like Bob George from a few decades ago that taught Christians that they weren't supposed to confess their sins, that their sins had already been forgiven, all that does is harden a person's conscience and make them very flippant in their approach. You know, we stumble in many ways, James says, and if we stumble in many ways and there's plenty of praying to be done over, "Lord, forgive me for my wicked, carnal thoughts. Forgive me for my wicked, carnal, angry words to others and for the things that I've done." There's plenty of praying to be done there, at least in my life.

Then the final thing that I mention, there's Trinity, trials, trespasses and then the triumphs, and what blessings are we enjoying right now? How has God helped us to think about those things and turn that into an occasion of thanksgiving and to express gratitude, "God, you've helped me here. God, look at all of the blessings that I have. Look at the family that you've given to me and the good life and the good day, and I've got the health to walk and to see the sunrise. God, thank you for all of those things." And that approach is so much different than just saying, "Okay, well, you know, today it's Aunt Martha and Uncle John and all of that and help them with this or that," and just kind of going through it. And it's easy for a pastor to fall into that because part of what you want to do, part of your responsibility as a pastor is to pray for your people and, you know, and you want to do that but, you know, you can intercede for your people as a pastor, and that's part of it, but that's not the whole of it, and what I kind of lost perspective on and lost practice of, is the fullness of those things in prayer that I've just described for the sake of taking too narrow approach of why I pray and what it means to be a pastor who tries to pray once in a while anyway.

Nathaniel. In seminary, we took a class actually on prayer, and it sounds really, a class on prayer.

Don. Yeah, we had one too.

Nathaniel. It was excellent and one of our projects was we had to spend a whole hour in just thanksgiving, a prayer of thanksgiving. And you know, it's a project but the idea is you're actually praying and that was one of those kinds of transformative moments. It's like that was no problem to fill an hour when you really think about it, about all the things that God has done and is doing. I mean, there's never enough time to thank God when you start thanking God.

Don. And especially if it's informed by biblical doctrine and biblical theology. You know, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Father chose us before the foundation of the world. The Son redeemed us at the cross. The Spirit drew us effectually to Christ, powerfully drew us to Christ and now indwells us and is keeping us. You could spend an hour on that alone if you just humble yourself before the Lord and set aside your earthly

preoccupations to think about what it is. And a spirit of moralistic therapeutic deism and that Seeker Sensitive model, it does not produce courageous thankful Christians. It just creates self-centered people who want to use God for their own earthly advancement. I'm sorry, that's a spirit of something else that I don't recognize as Christianity.

Nathaniel. That's just a great segue to, you know, we've talked a lot about history, the Sabbatical, now going into prophecy, what lies ahead, what we anticipate. You said some provocative things on Sunday that I'm excited to hear fleshed out. One of the things is that in the series coming up that you're aiming to challenge and to change the fundamental way people think and, you know, moralistic therapeutic deism would be kind of probably maybe capture that idea of how we can tend to think so easily changing fundamentally the way we think. Can you elaborate on that a little bit? I mean, it's a big goal.

Don. No, I can't.

Nathaniel. Okay. [laughter] Well, moving on.

Don. It's a pretty audacious, it's a pretty audacious thing to say. I recognize that. As I said on Sunday, you know, there's this spirit in the culture, the relativistic, postmodern, feelings-driven way that people think in the culture. "You have your truth. I have mine. Let's get along and there is no such thing as truth." You know, that's just spiritual arsenic. That is poison and that is the spirit of our age and we have to rise up and speak against it. We have to kind of expose it and then correct it. One of the things that we have to realize, and I'm probably going to preach on this aspect of it on Tuesday, is that this is not something that you correct with one message. This is not something that you read one book and it's corrected. This has been developing into the world's mindset and has saturated the church over decades and, you know, absent a great work of the Holy Spirit, it's going to take a lot of time to begin to undo that and to expose it and help people think differently.

And so yeah, so I've got seven different series that we're just going to do once I get started just back-to-back-to-back, you know, and how to know God exists. How to know the Bible is true. How to know that truth exists. How to know that Jesus is Lord. How to know true salvation. How to know God rules over all. And there's one other one that's slipping my mind in the moment. It'll probably pop in and I'll just blurt it out in a little bit. Waiting 3, 2, 1. It's not there. But all of these things, all of these things building together and the challenge for you, beloved, those of you that identify with our church or those of you that join us so regularly over the live stream in different places, the challenge for you is going to be to be patient with the process and to trust that there's a long-term thing that's being built and, you know, and not to get impatient and say, "Well, you know, when do we get on to the next series or when does something else start?" We've all been affected by this far more than we realize, far more than I realize. We can just as easily step outside and evaluate what it's like not to live in a postmodern world as a fish can step out of water and evaluate his own environment. We're in the middle of it, and so it's very difficult to pry these things open and look into them and apply biblical

answers to them. And I'm committed to the long-term process of it and I realize, you know, I realize that some people may get impatient with it, some people may not like it, but, Nathaniel, I've spent every day on the Sabbatical thinking about this very thing and what I need to be doing, and for weeks and weeks and weeks, I kept coming back right here. And that doesn't mean that it's the best thing to do, or it's the right thing to do, and it's no guarantee that the Lord's going to bless it, but I can't do anything else but what my conscience compels me to do with what I understand at this point in my ministry and with the opportunities and platform and the little footprint that the Lord has given to me. I can't do anything else. You know, ultimately it's for the Lord, and I'm just hoping that he'll use it to help people, help people in the church especially. And I'm just so mindful, one of the lesser-known things about our church is that there are over 100 young people 16-18 years old and under that are in our church, and this is a formative time in their lives. It's not just for them, the parents need this teaching just as much as they do, in some ways even more, but this is a unique, non-repeatable opportunity of a window in the lives of these young people to pour truth into them that they're not going to get any place else, from the world anyway, and you know, and it depends in large part on what their parents are doing with them at home. But there is this blessed opportunity to plant acorns in the hearts of your kids that will grow up to be oak trees when they're adults, but they have to be here to hear it for it to benefit them.

Nathaniel. And you know, you mentioned, it's formidable. It's something what the aim here to change the fundamental way people think to Scripture, to truth, it requires the work of the Spirit of God and it's true because we have our own flesh, we hate change. When somebody tells us, "You need to change the way you think," we say no, just like we did when we were two. It doesn't change. We say it in a different way. Besides that, you also mentioned we face cosmic forces, evil that energizes the ideology of our culture. It's way more than can be done humanly. It has to be the Spirit of God. Thinking about that, you know, as you're talking my mind is spinning and, you know, it's a good thing we have a long time for you to fill this out in the pulpit over the months to come.

Don. We trust so.

Nathaniel. Yes, definitely. Lord, keep him here, right, healthy, fill these things out for us. But just thinking about as a parent with younger children and formative ages, thinking about the significance of this, what would be your encouragement to parents as we are listening to these messages and thinking about our children and reinforcing these things, and you know, with that reality of our own flesh, the reality of the cosmic forces of evil that are in opposition? You know, what encouragement specifically to parents would you have going forward?

Don. Yeah, well, it's a real challenge to raise a family. You know, Nancy and I raised a family with six kids and, you know, there's schedules and all of that that you're trying to keep, and kids that need to be on a schedule or they've got classes the next day, school the next day, whatever, I get all of that and I'm very sympathetic to it. I know there were times when we were in California, you know, the thought of dragging ourselves out and getting everybody up and out to church and with a 40-minute drive or whatever, there

were times where I wasn't real motivated for that and so I'm sympathetic. I'm sympathetic with that. But I need as a pastor now I just kind of need to be candid and direct in answer to your question. I think, first of all, let me say that we have a number of young families, some that are in the room with us even tonight that make the effort to do that and that they're here on a faithful basis, and I'm confident that the Lord is going to bless them and honor them for placing such a priority on his word and fellowship with his people that they structure their family lives around it, and I thank God to have a church where we have young families like that. It's a great encouragement to me and it helps motivate me to keep doing what I'm doing to see families like that that that are around us. You know, I'm grateful for that.

Generally speaking and more broadly speaking, families need to realize, Nathaniel, that the days of easy Christian living that maybe you and I grew up with, those days are over. Stop and think about what's happening in recent years. The government in many places is sponsoring drag queen reading hours and beckoning children to come. The government is sanctioning grooming to create a sexually dysfunctional and perverted generation. Where is the counteraction to that? And one of the things that is very hard for families that love their children to understand, and I can say this with a little bit of perspective now that our families all grown and I've watched families in ministry over the years, the truth of the matter is when your kids are young you can do all of the fun family things together, you can have all kinds of extracurricular activities and support them in that, and do fun game things with them and all of that, but at the end of the day, that is not going to protect them from the spirit of the age. Only biblical truth implanted deep in their heart is going to protect them, and it is not difficult, and it's not surprising when a child gets into his teenage years or his college years and he turns against truth that was superficially presented in a family environment that was just focused on family and being together as a family and just, you know, what we do as a family. You know, your family is not a supernatural thing in and of itself to protect against the cosmic forces that are at work and seeking to take your children captive to do the devil's will. 2 Timothy, verses 24 through 26.

And so it takes a dad, it takes a father that takes truth seriously that is able to think beyond a, you know, a late bedtime and say, "No, there is a long-term thing that we're trying to do. We're trying to build truth into our children and to make it a priority to be with the people of God when the word of God is taught." And it may mean that you pass on certain extracurricular activities for the sake of that and you structure your life differently. Look, your kid's not going to grow up and play in the NFL anyway, so why build your whole life around a sport when eventually your kid's going to have to step into this increasingly demonic world and have a mind that's able to discern it and respond to it. We're living for eternity. We're not living for, you know, seeing our kid on an All-Star team. Does it sound like that matters to me?

Nathaniel. It sounds like it matters a lot.

Don. Yeah. It matters to God.

Nathaniel. Because that God has ordained truth, he's ordained what we need.

Don. He's ordained preaching to be the primary vehicle of the expression of his truth. When a church or a family or an individual doesn't take preaching seriously and avail themselves of it, without intending to, they're betraying a fundamental misunderstanding of what God has ordained for his people and how God blesses his people through the preaching of the word, not through family activities, first and foremost.

Nathaniel. So the best thing we can do as dads and leaders in the home, whatever, and the homes look differently, you know, there's different dynamics in different homes, but is bring ourselves under the leadership of the church through the preaching of the word on a consistent basis. I mean, that's like foundational is to be here when the word is preached.

Don. You know, and with what I'm about to say, I wasn't going to say this either but you're forcing me here, one of the things that I wanted to do that I didn't get to do as much while I was on Sabbatical as I'd hope was to visit some other churches and see what, see the way they do things and just get exposed to, get exposed to different things. And the most grievous memory perhaps I have in my entire Sabbatical as I sit here, is visiting a church that's not far from our home in Northern Kentucky. I went there alone. Nancy was away with Gretchen so I went there by myself, and I sat in back and it's, you know, it's obviously a very contemporary service. They sang one song with a lot of hoopla and emotion and lights and cameras and all that stuff going on. Okay, that's fine, but right after that opening segment of their 60-minute service, the youth pastor comes out, so there wasn't any kind of call to worship or anything, they just went right into the band's first number and then you stop that and the youth pastor comes out, and it was weird to me anyway because he was out there, Nathaniel, to promote the upcoming dodgeball night that they were going to have on Wednesday or Thursday or whatever it is. "It's going to be so great! You know, there's gonna be free Chick-fil-A and there's gonna be prizes and there's gonna be a little gospel devotional too!" You know, and all of these things are put on an equal plane. There's the gospel, and there's Chick-fil-A and there's dodgeball. I was so offended by that, by the loss of transcendence, the loss of any sense of worship to just go to a cheap promotional thing that you could have heard, you could have heard on a cheap television commercial trying to drag people out to play dodgeball when, what, the first five minutes we exhausted all that we had to say about the glory of God and the glory of Christ and expressing our worship, we were so done with that that now we needed to talk about dodgeball to keep the momentum going up? I was so offended, I just got up and walked out.

You know, I was sitting way in back so nobody really noticed me, but I had to clarify something. So they had couches out in their lobby area, and some of the door greeters were sitting there and I just, I just went up to, I went up to the man and I was very polite. I wasn't animated with him at all, but I said, "Sir, could you please tell me what kind of Baptist church this is?" And he didn't even know. He's greeting. "I don't know. That's a good question. Wilma, what kind of Baptist church is this?" "It's southern. It's Southern Baptist." You know, I heard her say it but he turned to me and said, "It's Southern Baptist," and I said, "Okay, thank you. Thank you for letting me know that." And I got up

to head toward the exit and he said, "You ain't leaving, are you?" And I looked at him and I shook my head. I had sorrow in my heart and I said, I said, "Yes, actually I am." And I just walked out. I'm sure that there are brothers and sisters in Christ at that church, but the way that you can conduct a worship service says so much about what your convictions really are and what you think is important, and even if we had a dodgeball night here at Truth Community Church and we wanted to announce it, the least we would do is wait till the end of the service to talk about that and not do a song and dodgeball for five minutes and then another song. This is nonsense. This is not serious. This is not serious. This is just about trying to attract people to our stuff and we can't abide, we can't abide that.

Nathaniel. And that is the state of the church around much of the country and even the world, and just real briefly, when you've talked about changing the fundamental way we think in the series that you have, you're thinking about the opportunities that we have to minister to people who are spiritually starved because that's all they have available, that's all they know, and ministering the truth for people coming alongside people who are seeking to also establish ministry according to the truth, so the reach of what's happening here is beyond the walls of this ministry itself and there's opportunity to encourage other people in the kingdom of God for the cause of Christ. Do you want to take a couple of minutes and just expand on some of those opportunities you're thinking about?

Don. Yeah, well, what I would say is, and I know time is short and I was going to say there's a lot of cookies to eat, then I just realized that would completely undermine everything that I just said. So forget so forget I said that.

Nathaniel. We'll just go another hour just to prove the point.

Don. At least it's at the end of the interview.

Nathaniel. That's right.

Don. When it comes to ministry and all of that with all of us collectively together in the different lives that the Lord has given to us, you know, I'm really convinced that the opportunities to minister are going to come naturally as we ourselves are finding our minds transformed. And you know, Romans 12 says that, you know, "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." Peter said, "Long for the pure milk of the word so that by it you might grow in salvation." You know, if our minds are developed, we're going to know in the midst of the conversation, in the midst of the moment, in the midst of the opportunity, we're going to know how to respond in that moment because the Spirit will give us wisdom and the truth that we've applied ourselves and made the effort to learn and internalize and meditate on, you know, the Spirit will bring that to mind and give us wisdom and power in the midst of things, and people may take it or leave it but we'll honor Christ by standing firm for his truth and not swimming along with the stream of the spirit of our age. And when it comes to parents and going back to that question in terms of what the parents can do, it's not in the being present with us when we do what we do,

you know, that's only the start, the real value and the real power and the opportunity for the parents is that when you stand up and when you sit down and when you lie down, you know, having those conversations. You know, "What was it that we heard at church on Sunday? And what do you think about that? And do you remember? Do you remember this?" And just being able to interact and the cumulative impact of all of those conversations that you soon enough forget about, the cumulative impact of that is what the Lord uses to shape a young heart to have convictions of truth as we pray for them and as we lead them and as the Spirit of God is gracious to us. And that, that is what we're after when it comes to our young people.

Look, I'm sorry, but you know, I'm not interested in trying to entertain our young people while the adults meet for worship and to send them away. I want them in here and that's the way we do things, and there's a reason for it because I know that they absorb far more than we think they do, and this is a non-repeatable time when their minds are capable of being shaped by the word of God. That is what a parent needs to long for if they are in Christ and they are, you know, and they are longing for the long-term eternal well-being of their young person, and to realize there's opportunity here that passes far more quickly than you think when you're on the front end of it.

Nathaniel. Amen. Amen. What better thing can we do than put our children under the word of God?

Don. Put them in the way of truth and let the Lord work in it. It's, you know it's not complicated. It takes a commitment. It's hard. It's not complicated.

Nathaniel. Yeah, that's right. Amen. Just one wrap up question and then we'll close. We've talked a lot about Christ, about being in Christ, I don't know, I haven't looked around to see who's here, but there might have been perhaps somebody that came in for the first time and they're outside of Christ, so just in closing, what do you have for that person who has been hearing about life in Christ, hearing about a church that seeks to honor Christ and yet they're outside of Christ?

Don. That's a great question, and a great way to close it. I think, I think the starting point is to realize is that you were created by an eternal God and God created you and made you and one day you will give an account of your life to him so there's this transcendence to life that that you need to recognize and the meaning and purpose of life is that your life came from God and one day you're going to stand before God, and all points in between are defined by that. And as you think about that, you think that you haven't loved God with all of your heart, soul, strength and mind, you've sinned against him and in thought, word, and deed, that you need a Redeemer, and that God, in his grace and in his love, has sent into the world a Savior who is Christ Jesus the Lord who lived a perfect life, who made an atoning death for sinners at the cross, who was buried and raised again for the justification of everyone who would ever believe in him, and that Christ who in love did that for sinners like you, calls you and invites you to come to him alone for salvation. And it's not simply a matter of believing a certain element of truth, it's a matter of coming to the person of Jesus Christ, falling down before him, "I am a sinner. Lord Jesus, save

me and transform me and change me and take me as your own." You're coming to a person, not just giving mental acquiescence to a few biblical facts. You're coming to a person who is real, in the words of Francis Schaeffer, there are some books that I read, in the words of Francis Schaeffer, he is the God who is there. This God exists. Christ exists. The gospel is true and Christ calls you truly to come to him and promises you forgiveness of sin and eternal life if you do. We're laying the foundation in the months to come to be able to proclaim that great eternal message more effectively in the spheres that the Lord gives to us.

Nathaniel. Amen. That was worth the price of admission to hear the gospel in that way. And Don, I'm really grateful that you're back, and I mean that with all my heart. I'm grateful that you're my pastor and I'm thankful for the time you've given us tonight to give us a look inside of what the Lord has done in in your life over the last four months, and the things that lie ahead for us.

Don. Yeah, and Nathaniel, I speak for everyone in this room that's associated with our church. You know, we're all grateful to God for you. You are a real, you are a real gift from God to Truth Community Church and your presence and your ministry here is a signature token of the blessing of God on our church and it's a proof, it's a proof of the love of God for us that that you, yourself, are here and you're certainly a gift from God to me. So it goes both ways, I guess.

Nathaniel. Well, praise the Lord for his grace and just for the gracious people that the Lord has brought here as part of the body of the church as well.

Don. Yeah, we've got a great congregation, don't we?

Nathaniel. We do, absolutely.

Don. We're blessed as pastors to have people like this to go through life together and to minister together with.

Nathaniel. Amen, that's right. Well, I would like you to close us in prayer, if you would.

Don. All right, why don't we stand for prayer and a benediction?

Well, Father, we are grateful for this time, grateful for your word. Father, we would start an hour of thanksgiving in what we have to say. Thank you for choosing your people before the foundation of the world. Thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ who purchased redemption at the cross in his death, burial, resurrection and ascension. Thank you that he is coming again for his own and to bring to an end this wicked world and usher in a millennial kingdom where righteousness will dwell. Thank you for the Spirit who indwells us, instructs us, and illuminates us, guides us, protects us, keeps us. And Father, thank you for this church and for the people in this church that we have the opportunity to go through life together. Help us to assess the gift and the gifts that you have given to us rightly so that our hearts would be thankful, that our hearts would be faithful, and that

our lives would be shaped by the priorities that glorify Christ the most. Bless our time as we fellowship now together in the time and the hour ahead. You are so good. You are so great. You are so gracious. And we offer you ourselves without reservation and with full gratitude to you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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